

Creative Games for the Language Class

By Lee Su Kim

There is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature, and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games.

There are many advantages of using games in the classroom:

1. Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
2. They are motivating and challenging.
3. Learning a language requires a great deal of effort. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
4. Games provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading.
5. They encourage students to interact and communicate.
6. They create a meaningful context for language use.

Many of us in the teaching profession use games occasionally in the classroom. Most of us are familiar with some of the more popular language games such as "Twenty Questions," "The Whispering Game," "Making a Sentence," "Asking Yes/No Questions" or "Kim's Game."

I would like to introduce to you some games which I have adapted from the radio and television for the language class. These games have been successfully tried out in class. The students thoroughly enjoyed themselves, whilst using and practising the language.

Just A Minute

The first game is called "Just a Minute" and it is adapted from a radio game show broadcast over the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). It was aired over the BBC many years ago and was highly entertaining. This is how you play the game:

1. Divide your students into groups. Get each group to give themselves a name.

2. The objective of each group is to get as many points as possible.
3. The task is to speak on a topic for a minute. The referee (the teacher) will provide the topics.
4. The competition-members of the other groups-should try to "wrestle" the topic away from the person who is speaking on it. There are three ways to do this:
 - i. Hesitation: When a student pauses for too long a break, it is considered a hesitation.
 - ii. Repetition: When a student keeps repeating a particular word or phrase, it is considered repetition.
 - iii. Deviation: When a student digresses, he can be faulted for deviation.
5. A timekeeper will ring the bell once the minute is up. The person who is speaking when the bell rings will win 10 points.
6. The group with the most points is the winner.
7. The teacher should determine the topics based upon the students' level of proficiency. Some examples of topics are:
 - My Childhood
 - My Family
 - My Favourite Things
 - Ghosts
 - My Ideal Partner
 - Teenagers
 - A Country I'd Like to Visit
 - My Favourite Food
 - If I Had Three Wishes, I'd Like . . .

The choice of topics would also depend on what is being taught in the lesson for the day. For example, if the teacher is conducting a lesson on describing people and places, s/he could provide topics such as My Mother, Someone I Admire, A Teacher I'll Never Forget, My Hometown, or My School.

This game is particularly suitable for teaching oral communication skills. It is also useful as a pre-writing or pre- reading activity. It can be effectively utilised when teaching topics such as describing, narrating, expressing viewpoints, agreeing, disagreeing, and describing procedures.

Win, Lose, or Draw

The second game is quite a well-known one. It is currently being aired on television in Malaysia, and is called "Win, Lose, or Draw." You can play it with as many teams as you like, preferably keeping it to a maximum of four or five teams.

Instead of giving the students the words to draw, I find it even more effective if you get the students to concoct the words themselves. The words should be "drawable," not too easy nor too difficult. Give the groups about 10-15 minutes to come up with the words; then the teacher should go round to the different groups to check out the words. Tick out those that are suitable and try and offer alternatives for those words that you consider unsuitable. Each topic should then be written out on a small piece of paper which can be rolled or folded up. Then, collect all the topics and place them in separate boxes in front of you.

The game is then played as follows:

1. Divide your class into groups.
2. Start with the first group. A member of the group should come to the front of the classroom and pick out a piece of paper containing a topic given by members of the other groups. S/he then has to draw the topic on the blackboard once the timekeeper gives the "begin" signal.
3. Appoint someone to keep time. A student has a maximum of 60 seconds to draw the object. This can vary according to your students' abilities.
4. The objective is to try to score as few points as possible.
5. The task is for group members to try to guess what the student is drawing in as little time as possible.
6. The student doing the drawing cannot talk, make any sound, nor act out the word. Only when his/her group members have guessed the word correctly, can s/he indicate or gesticulate that they have done so.
7. The teacher has to be alert and listen carefully whilst the students try to guess what their friend is drawing. Once they have guessed the topic correctly, the teacher stops the action.
8. The timekeeper announces the time taken and records it on the board.
9. After this, the next group takes its turn. The game can be played for many rounds. Students in each group should take turns drawing.
10. At the end of the game, the scores are tallied. The group with the fewest points is the winner.

This game is suitable for teaching vocabulary items, but phrases or sentences can also be given. For example, "singing in the rain," "a school of fish," "the fat woman

fainted," "the ostrich kicked the zebra," "the spaceship landed on the moon," etc. Tenses and sentence structures can also be introduced through this game.

Conclusion

It is important that the language teacher be creative and innovative in his/her job. Dare to deviate occasionally from the humdrum routine and do something refreshing and different in the class. It does not require too much effort, and the rewards are plenty - the joy on the students' faces, the mirth, the hilarity, and the enthusiasm generated. Finally, when playing the game, teachers should be totally committed and enthusiastic.

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